

THE SWING THEORY OF ISLAM: A STUDY OF ERNEST GELLNER EPISTEMOLOGY

Supriyanto UIN Prof. KH. Saifuddin Zuhri Purwokerto supriyanto@uinsaizu.ac.id

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ABSTRACT:

Theory is the highest form of knowledge. As for the person who succeeds in giving birth to a theory, he can be said to be someone who really deserves 'appreciation'. Gellner as a sociologist managed to read the social reality of Islam by giving birth to the pendulum swing theory in Islam - A Pendulum Swing Theory of Islam. This article tries to explain Ernest Gellner's theory. From studies conducted show that: 1) His theory was born from his interest in Islam, for him Islam has a structure and character that is unique compared to religion outside, 2) The ability of Islam to respond to change without losing 'identity' makes the social response of Muslims in a level that 'established.' This second point, for Gellner, is the key to why Muslims' social reality movements tend to 'flux and reflux of religion' as well as the Pendulum swing.

Keywords: Gellner, Reality, Social and Islam.

ABSTRAK:

Teori merupakan bentuk tertinggi dari pengetahuan. Adapun orang yang berhasil melahirkan suatu teori, ia dapat dikatakan sebagai seseorang yang sangat pantas untuk mendapat 'penghargaan'. Gellner sebagai seorang sosiolog berhasil membaca realitas sosial Islam dengan melahirkan teori ayunan bandul dalam Islam—A Pendulum Swing Theory of Islam. Artikel ini mencoba untuk memaparkan teori Ernest Gellner tersebut. Dari kajian yang dilakukan menunjukkan bahwa: 1) Teorinya lahir dari ketertarikannya kepada Islam, baginya Islam memiliki struktur dan karakter yang unik dibanding agama di luarnya, 2) Kemampuan Islam dalam merespon perubahan tanpa kehilangan 'jati dirinya' menjadikan respon sosial umat Islam dalam tataran yang 'mapan.' Poin kedua ini, bagi Gellner adalah kunci mengapa pergerakan realitas sosial umat Islam cenderung 'flux and reflux of religion' seperti halnya ayunan Bandul.

Kata Kunci: Gellner, Realitas, Sosial dan Islam.

INTRODUCTION

Socio-religious reality—according to Moh Soehadha—is something that is processual and emergency (Soehadha, 2018). Processual means that socioreligious phenomena are something that continues to move without knowing an end, so a dynamic 'study tool' is needed (Suprapta, 2016). Meanwhile, emergency means that in responding to social realities that are always changing at any time, analytical tools are needed—as well as



solutions, in order to understand the phenomenon. Due to its emergency nature, the analytical framework and solutions to social reality can not only rely on existing theories, but must continue to undergo renewal (Soehadha, 2018).

Theory is the highest form of knowledge (Mukhlishin & Suhendri, 2017). Because not all experts are able to formulate new theories. Therefore, people who succeed in 'theorizing-or updating the theory' have an important and highly valued position, because theory is the main goal of science itself (Subekti et al., 2021).

In the last few decades, it is undeniable that the study of the sociology of religion in Islamic society has been heavily influenced by the great ideas initiated by Ibn Khaldun (Riyadi, 2018). Ibn Khaldun is considered a figure who is able to provide an adequate framework for the development of new discourses in the study of sociology. However, because of its processual nature-constantly moving or changing without knowing an end-the discourse that he offers is no longer sufficient to understand the evolving social phenomena. A new set of theoryanalysis-is needed in order to understand and explain these processual phenomena (Kasdi, 2014). It is on this basis that sociologists such as Ernest Gellner are called upon to 're-read' this theory

(PUSAD Paramadina, n.d.). In this paper, Ernest Gellner's view on the phenomenon of Islamic society will be described by the author, by referring to his writing entitled A Pendulum Swing Theory of Islam.

Research or work discussing Ernest Gellner has actually been done by many academics. First, Abdul Kadir Riyadi with his article entitled Kajian atas Wacana Tasawuf dan Keutuhan Sosial Ernest Gellner (Riyadi, 2018), discusses Ernest Gellner's thoughts on Sufism and its relation to social cohesion. In the study, he concluded that Gellner often had motion errors in understanding modernity and Sufism-tarekat. Gellner's view-in Abdul Kadir's research-tends to be pejorative towards tawasuf. According to Gellner, Sufism will not be able to survive in the conditions of modern society which voices about freedom, openness, rationality, and equality (Gellner, 1995a)where this is not found in the structure of Sufism followers. In reality, Gellner's view is not proven. Sufism is able to maintain its existence in modern life for several reasons, one of which has 'spirit of capitalism' as the strong one (Riyadi, 2018). Besides these economic aspects, there are three other things that support its sustainability, namely of aspects leadership, aspects of vision, and aspects of social cohesion.

Second, Edi Susanto with his article entitled Radikalisasi Kehidupan Keberagamaan Perspektif Sosiologi Pengetahuan di Kabupaten Pamekasan (Susanto, 2014). Edi, did not discuss specifically about the material object—Pendulum Swing Theory, nor the formal object—Ernest Gellner, he only used Ernest Gellner's view of Islamic fundamentalism to analyze the reality of religion in Sumenep Regency. In particular is Gellner's view which states that Islamic fundamentalism was not born only as a reaction to the challenges of modernity, but also has continuity with the long history of Muslims.

Third, Ozi Setiadi with his article entitled Islam dan Pergerakan Civil Society Trans-nasional Kebudayaan Hizmet di Indonesia (Setiadi, 2017). In his article, Ozi also did not discuss specifically about material objects-Pendulum Swing Theory, nor material objects-Ernest Gellner. In his research, Ozi only uses Ernest Gellner's view of civil society, which states that civil society does not have a structural relationship with the state. It is a group of people who are independent and stand autonomously, connected through productive networks, and only need space to move, which is called public space. Gellner's view is used by Ozi as a knife in his analysis of the Hizmet movement in Indonesia.

Apart from these three studies, there are still many studies that discuss Ernest Gellner. In this paper, the researcher has a different position and object of study from several previous studies. It is by focusing on the theory of the Pendulum Swing—a Pendulum Swing Theory of Islam—which was initiated by Ernest Gellner and its operations in reading the reality of the Eastern world— Islam.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research type is library research. This means that in this study the author focuses on the use of data and information with the help of various kinds of materials found in the library, such as books, journals, historical documents, and so on. in this case followed by writing, editing, clarifying, reducing, and presenting data (Kartini, 1996).

The data sources used as references in this study, the authors divide into two categories, namely primary data sources and secondary data sources. The primary data in this study are books by Ernest Gellner which more or less discuss the Pendulum Swing Theory. The secondary data sources used in this study are documents in the form of written sources such as books, books, articles, and other documents related to the research theme that the researcher is studying.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Short Biography of Ernest Gellner

Gellner comes from a Jewish-German family (Riyadi, 2018). He was born in Prague in 1925 and lived there until 1939. He moved to England at the age of 13, and remained there as a British citizen. Towards the end of his life, he moved again to his hometown—Prague and died there in 1995(Riyadi, 2018).

As a Jew—it is said—he is not comfortable with his religious identity. According to John A. Hall, Gellner considered his identity a burden. She wants to live a 'normal' life and be treated 'normally.' He didn't want to be 'imprisoned' just because he was born a Jew. As long as that identity is embedded in him, he feels that life is 'under pressure'.¹ On this basis, he then took off his religious clothes and chose to become an atheist (Hall, 2011).

His academic journey began with Gellner studying philosophy at the University of Oxford in 1945-1947. Although only a few years, Gellner can master this field very well. He has a qualified talent as a thinker and philosopher.²

Ernest Gellner's role in the development of sociology is undeniable (Rivadi, 2018). He has dedicated his entire life and career to contribute to the development of this field of science. Not a few who accept his views and ideas, but many also reject them. Thoughts about Ibn Khaldun, Sufism and the Muslim community is one that made his name 'skyrocket' and is known in almost the whole world.3 His views on the Islamic world made him a man who was lovedbut also despised. Some accused him of deliberately cornering Islam and positioning it at an 'inferior' degree in front of Western civilization.

Despite the controversy he created, photographing what was on his mind was still important. For Gellner, Islamic sociology has a number of reasons to be worthy of the interest of sociologists (Gellner, 1995b). One of them for Gellner, Islam—perhaps more than any other religion, is a 'blueprint,' the regularity of the social order (Gellner, 1995a). That is, as the social order of Islam

¹ In particular, he spoke of a sentiment he called "the oppression of the Jews," (Hall, 2011).

² Later, when he became an expert in other fields of science, his philosophical touch never disappeared from his thoughts (Riyadi, 2018).

³ Ibn Khaldun's ideas about asabiyah (primordialism), and social cohesion are very

interesting to study in order to understand the social world of Islamic society. Ibn Khaldun's theory was good for his time, but not always suitable for different times. It is on this basis that sociologists such as Ernest Gellner are called upon to reread this theory (Riyadi, 2018).

cannot be shaken. It's established. This is Gellner's complaint throughout his work on Islam.⁴

Gellner's objectivity sometimes appears in the midst of his subjectivity. He does not mind recognizing Islam as the only religion that has a strong defense in the face of change and globalization in this modern era (Gellner, 1995a). Gellner was attracted to Islam because of its ability to respond to these changes. For him, Islam has a high adaptive capacity-'flexible' or flexible-without being a victim of the change itself. Gellner felt strange about this religion. He was curious because Islam 'always refutes' the theories that he stretches.

Gellner and A Pendulum Swing Theory of Islam

The author wants to start with four major themes-which they are-the focus of Gellner's attention. First, the philosophy of history and the attempt to understand the laws that control social

society. change in Second, issues concerning nationalism or nationalism, relativism, and universalism in philosophy. Third, the emergence of science in the modern world, and fourth, the study of Islamic sociology. Hall then simplifies the four themes into two, namely social change and Islamic sociology. Recognizing the important role of Islam in the constellation of modern life, Gellner felt compelled to reread the theory put forward by Ibn Khaldun-especially about rural Islam and urban Islam.

In his article—A Pendulum Swing Theory of Islam, he begins with an interest in David Hume who wrote a book entitled The Natural History of Religion (Gellner, 1995b). Hume presented several theories about religion, which were not always consistent with one another. He started with a rather conventional theory on a unilineal line, 'a progression from polytheism to monotheism.' As for the relationship with the swing theory

⁴ Speaking of Gellner, it cannot be separated from the discussion of nationalism. Gellner envisioned that different societies from all over the world should be united under the same umbrella, namely modernity. Cultural assimilation is the main strategy for how this uniformity can be realized. Thus, with a thumping tone he "screamed out," "the history of modernity has shown that traditional societies must be abolished and a single, high-level culture must be imposed. This is where the struggle between Gellner's discourse and Islam lies. It was too difficult for him to subdue Islam. With a tone full of concern, he complained that Islam is a blueprint for social order. Speaking of

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between the views of polytheism and monotheism, according to Hume, society has a tendency to move from polytheism to monotheism, then back to polytheism, and so on until the end of time. (Gellner, 1995b).

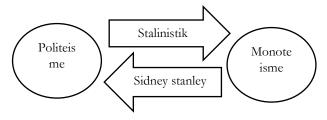


Image 1. Schematic of alternating current David Hume

To Gellner, Hume's arguments were attractive but not overwhelming. The reason is psychological. The reasons for development of polytheism the to monotheism are the so-called stalinistic tendencies in the human psyche. It means the recognition of certain entities that are pre-eminence or the owner of the power. excellence—all So that religious adherents 'race' to worship the pre-eminence entity. But then the pendulum swings back. The reverse process also occurs. This condition is called the Sydney Stanley symptom. So, to get to the pre-eminence God, something that functions as an intermediary is needed

⁵ The Pantheon is a building constructed around 27 BC as a temple in the center of Rome. This temple was completed during the reign of Emperor Hadrian in 126 AD Hadrian built this to get to Him. This pushes religious people back to the pantheon,⁵ which are many.

Perhaps in the context of Islam, Hume's theory seems interesting to see the transition from polytheism to monotheism, in this case the teachings of Tawhid brought by Prophet Ibrahim. In historical records, Prophet Ibrahim can be said to have succeeded in teaching the religion of monotheism. However, over time, paganism the practice of worshiping idols again - was carried out by pre-Islamic Arabs (NU Online, n.d.). When referring to the Qur'an, the Arabs at that time did not believe in Allah. They believe in His existence. Mentioned in QS. al-Zumar: 38:

ٱلْتَهُمْ مَّنْ خَلَقَ السَّمَوْتِ وَالْأَرْضَ لَتَقُوْلُنَّ اللَّهُ قُلْ أَفَرَءَيْتُمْ مَّا تَدْعُوْنَ مِنْ ادَادَذ قَل ىَتَوَكُّلُ الْمُتَوَكِّلُوْنَ

'And indeed, if you ask them, 'Who created the heavens and the earth?' Surely,

temple for worship of Roman gods. The name Pantheon comes from the Greek word meaning house of all the gods ("Pantheon, Roma," 2021).

they answered, 'God.' Say, 'Then do you know about what you worship besides Allah, if Allah were to bring disaster to me, would they be able to remove it, or if Allah wanted to have mercy on me, would they be able to prevent His mercy?' Say, 'Allah is sufficient for me. To Him are those who put their trust in Him.'

That if they are asked about the creator of the heavens and the earth, they will answer Allah. The pagans also knew Allah as the owner of the Kaaba. *Rabb al-Bayt*, as in QS. al-Quraish: 3:

فَلْيَعْبُدُوا رَبَّ هٰذَا الْبَيْتِ

'So let them worship the Lord (owner) of this house (Ka'bah)'

So, for them, Allah is an entity that is too high and unreachable so that idols are needed as intermediaries to get closer and reach Him. This is alluded to in the Qur'an al-Zumar: 38, 'We do not worship their idols in order to draw us closer to Allah as closely as possible. (Ghazali, 2012).'

Back to Ernest Gellner in his pendulum swing theory—where the focus of his research is the Moroccan Muslim community (Gellner, 1995b), especially Sufistic Islam which continues to be dynamic in facing change. The main idea is that the Sufis have a big role in leading change. They are the main players, not only in religious matters, but also in social, political, and economic contexts.

On the theoretical aspect, what stands out from his thinking is the presence of Ibn Khaldun which is very strong. Theories of rural Islam and urban Islam along with solidarity and social cohesion are important reading tools.⁶ Then combined with David Hume's theory of oscillation and Max Weber's social theory. Be an orchestra between Islam and the West in a unique but controversial presentation.

The author would like to begin the study of Gellner with his pendulum swing theory, with the division of Islamic typology (society) into two by Ernest Gellner. He divides and distinguishes what he calls 'High Islam' and 'Low Islam.' High Islam is an advanced dimension and is ready to take off. While low Islam is what invites back. High Islam is rational and emphasizes the scientific aspect. This type of Islam, according to Gellner, is based on Sharia and makes the interpretation of the ulama a legacy of his

⁶ In his concept, Ibn Khaldun divides the typology of types of Islamic society into two parts, the first is *badawah* (rural Islam), and the second is *badarah* (urban Islam). Badawah—according to Khaldun—are those who live in the interior,

primitive society, or live in desert areas. Meanwhile, hadarah is a society that is identical with city life, or also often referred to as a civilized society—having civilization (Fajar, 2019).

thoughts. Higher Islam is open, comprehensive, and has the potential to accept industrialization, modernity, and progress.

Higher Islamic scholars create what is called a 'unity of view of life' that guides people to enlightenment and progress. Because it is enlightened, high Islam is able to abandon mystical rituals based on Sufism, Sufism, and cults against individuals. (Gellner, 1995b). As for what is meant by low Islam, it is the opposite— High Islam.

High Islam is embraced by the reformists. They have characteristics, among others: 1) highly educated, 2) support the idea of national identity and the concept of nation-state, 3) anticolonial, 4) anti-westernization but accept industrialization, and 5) anti-political elite. For the record. the last three characteristics become a reference why high Islam, according to Gellner, still deserves to be called a fundamentalist (Riyadi, 2018).

Accepting the high Islam and completely eliminating the low Islam is Gellner's line of thought. The idea is that if Muslim society wants to create internal solidarity and cohesion, then the only way is to eliminate low Islam. It is this uniformity that guarantees solidarity, and solidarity makes cohesion, cohesion creates peace and security, and security creates prosperity.

Uniformity can be achieved by means of rural people 'urbanization' to the 'orthodoxy' is replaced with city, modernity, tradition is replaced with rationality, low Islam (sufism) is abandoned and high Islam is preached. Borrowing Hume, Gellner said, 'The success of religion lies in its recognition of something rational.'

The process of moving from diversity to uniformity and from the phase of backwardness to progress he calls transition. There are two transition processes that must be passed by the Muslim community, namely the first, the transition from low Islam to high Islam, and second, the transition from high Islam to modernity. The first process is carried out so that Islam can be separated from the magical dimension, while the second process is needed so that Islam can become part of the modern world that is plural, tolerant, democratic, liberal, and cohesive. With these two processes, according to him, Islam will be able to transform from a traditional religion to a modern religion.

So, in a simple and limited way, Gellner assumes that low Islam is synonymous with stupidity, one of which is rejecting the world and teaching zuhud (asceticism, an anti-world attitude). The problem is, when the first stage of transition takes place, it is not certain that the second stage of transition-high Islam to modernity-will be successful. Gellner argued that firstly, only reformers in Islam are ready for the transition to modernity, secondly, the role of Islam is low-sufism is too strong in Islam, and thirdly, Islam has always wanted to go backwards-even though it has succeeded in moving forward. There were times when Islam successfully underwent a second phase of transition, but quickly returned to its roots, namely Sharia. For Gellner this is a problem. According to him, the Islamic movement is like a swing or 'flux and reflux of religion,' borrowing Hume's theory, he describes it as the anti-thesis of progressive Western civilization. The nature of back and forth like this swing, for Gellner is the main reason why Muslim society has never changed.

Ernest Gellner's theory, of course, cannot be separated from the criticism directed at him, to mention the name, Talal Asad for example. For Asad, Gellner's theory is nothing more than 'orientalist conceit.' Gellner for Asad is part of an orientalist tradition that looks down on Eastern nations, including Arab-Islamic. This is certainly not a sentimental issue, but a question of 'how to read'. Asad believes that the Western mindset is not always suitable for reading the phenomenon of Islamic society. Gellner's biggest mistake was that he wanted to impose European methods for interpreting other nations' culturesincluding traditions-social reality-Islam (Riyadi, 2018). That is what became 'Gellner's worst disease'. He is so obsessed with the 'European' school. Everythingincluding Islam-he wanted Europe to do. If it doesn't work, he then calls it 'rebellion' or in his own terms is often called 'fundamentalism'.

CONCLUSION

Despite the controversy over the theory, by borrowing the theory of paradigm-Thomas Kuhn, the author tries to draw conclusions. For Gellner, the establishment of Islam is one of which is marked by his ability-Islam-to respond to change-without losing his identity. This for him becomes something of a paradox, in the sense that stability can also be understood as an unwillingness to change 'totally.' The Islamic movement, which is like a swing, for Gellneraccording to the author-is like the emergence of a new paradigm, which actually originates from the old paradigm. The anomalies that then gave birth to the crisis, actually became a motivation for Muslims to 'go back' and look back at

what they left behind. Gellner's efforts in understanding the social phenomena of Muslims need to be appreciated regardless of their status and identity—as an addition to our scientific treasures in understanding socio-religious issues.

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